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Subject: Sierra Club Testimony on HB 1976
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Sierra Club testimony on HB 1976.



Sierra Club

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LATE TESTIMONY

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, & OCEAN RESOURCES

January 27, 2012, 9:00 A.M.

(Testimony is 2 pages long)

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1976 WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Aloha Chair Chang and Committee Members -

The Sierra Club, Hawai'i Chapter, with 9,000 dues-paying members and supporters, supports HB 1976. This bill provides dedicated funding for the creation of a statewide trail and access program, as well as the state park system, via a constitutional amendment.

The Department of Land and Natural Resources recently issued a report¹ that asked:

Hawai'i residents flock to our State Parks, trails, cabins, small boat harbors and campgrounds to spend time with their families and friends in open, beautiful spaces. Our State recreational facilities provide residents and visitors with healthy activities and access to sustenance for hikers, fishers, hunters and gatherers.

But if our residents, small businesses and tourism industry rely upon these places, how come they look so junk?

The answer, quite frankly, is a lack of funding. Less than 1% of the State's budget goes into funding our parks and protection of our wildlife. Hawai'i ranks 48th in the country for fish and wildlife funding. Hawai'i has nearly 300 endangered species--the most in the nation--and plants and animals continue to go extinct as the state's meager spending fails to protect them. On all of our islands, we are witnessing a degradation of our natural areas.

Consider our state park system. Our state parks are the gems that provide visitors with access to the wild natural beauty of Hawai'i. But today our state parks are desperately poor condition—and in some cases, disasters waiting to happen. A recent inventory by the DLNR found that an investment of over \$244 million was needed to bring our parks, harbors, and trails up to

¹ State of the State Recreational Places, December 2010

acceptable conditions. Despite this report, no dollars - zero - were allocated to fix any facilities in State Parks in 2011.

Improvements to our parks and trails could help our number one industry: tourism. Many of our visitors are returning guest -- people who've visited Hawai'i before. But if visitors see the glossy advertisements for Hawaii's wild places in magazines, spend thousands on a vacation to experience what they saw, and then find that there are no toilet seats in the bathrooms and the trail is pot-holed and overgrown, they may no longer return.

Our "externalities"—breathtaking coastlines, verdant mountains, wild rain forests—are not as "free" as we thought. Without allocating resources to preserve them, our valuable attractions will disappear. And so will the tourists and residents who seek them.

Perhaps more importantly, however, investments into our parks, trails, and wild areas will help ensure we protect and preserve the cultural heritage that makes Hawai'i special. Let's ensure our keiki have a legacy of green trails and pristine parks.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.